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Interview With Reporters on Air Force One

January 16, 1994

The President. Are you all exhausted?

Q. Yes.

Q. Aren't you?

The President's Trip

The President. Yes, I really just wanted to say that I think we had a good trip, and I'm sorry I put you through so much. You must be tired. I know I am. But I think it was really a good trip. And I appreciate how much work was done on it.

I thought we might just talk for a few minutes about it, kind of in a wrap-up fashion. But before we do, I wanted to say that after I got back on the plane, I called Prime Minister Rabin and President Mubarak to report on my meeting with Asad. And I attempted to call but was unsuccessful in reaching King Fahd. I'm going to talk to him probably tomorrow morning, just to tell them what had gone on in the meeting and what the statement was and get their sense of what was going to happen. Rabin had watched it live.

Q. What?

The President. Rabin had watched it live. And I couldn't tell whether Mubarak did or not. I think he did, but we had kind of a static connection, so I couldn't be sure. But everybody seemed to be pretty positive about it.

Anyway, looking back over the trip, I can say without any hesitation that it certainly met all of our objectives when we went on the trip. Everything that we hoped would happen did. And I think there were basically three big elements to it.

The first was the prospect of really uniting Europe for the first time since nations have been on the landscape there. I'm very encouraged by the initial reaction to the Partnership For Peace. All the Central and Eastern European countries and the Visegrad nations have said they want to join. Russia, Ukraine expressed an interest. We've now heard some interest from Romania. So I'm feeling quite good about that. Even the Swiss

said they wanted to think about whether there was some way they could support it even if they didn't join, given their historic neutrality. I feel very good about it.

The second important thing, of course, was the nuclear breakthrough, the agreement with Ukraine following the agreement that had been reached earlier in the year with Belarus and Kazakhstan, not having our nuclear weapons targeted at anybody, not having their nuclear weapons targeted at us. It's a really important next step. And we also had some important discussions with the Russians about going in and making sure that START I is completely ratified and implemented and that START II is ratified and implemented and that we keep thinking about what further steps there ought to be. So this was a very good meeting in the trip in that respect.

And then the third aspect of the trip was the whole movement toward not only uniting Europe economically and politically but kind of getting growth back into the system. I met with the leaders of the European Union. We talked about how to implement the GATT agreement, how to follow up on it, how important it was to get the growth rates up in Europe again, how important it was to open new markets to Eastern Europe and states of the former Soviet Union. And then, of course, I talked about economics in Prague and then spent a lot of time dealing with it in Russia. And I must say, even though they've had a really tough time, I think they're on the verge of having some good things happen economically.

For all the criticism of the pace of reform in Russia, one of the little known facts about it is that in terms of privatizing companies, Russia's actually running ahead of the pace of the other former Communist economies. There's some other problems they have to deal with, their inflation problems and just having a legal framework that will attract more investment, but I feel quite good about that. Just from my experience in Moscow, I really think that while there are, as you would imagine, uncertainties among the people there because of all the hardships and the difficulty of sort of visualizing the future, I think there's a lot of emotion to the idea that the people ought to rule the country.

I didn't get much sense in anybody that they wanted a more authoritarian government. I think they like the fact that the voters are in the driver's seat, even though they're still trying to come to grips with exactly what that means and how to translate it into policies.

So I would say on grounds of building a united Europe in terms of security, where all the neighbors agree to respect one another's borders, moving to continually reduce the nuclear threat to the world, and supporting economic and political reform in Europe and the former Communist countries, this was a very, very successful trip.

And that's before we did the Middle East thing today. I went to this meeting hoping that we could get a signal from President Asad that was clear and unmistakable that he was ready to make a complete peace. Today—the first time he had ever explicitly said he wanted an end to the hostilities with Israel, willing to make peace with Israel as opposed to saying something like “peace in the Middle East,” and that peace to him meant normal peaceful relations, which is a general term that encompasses trade, tourism and travel, and embassies. So that was very significant. That sends a very clear signal now back to the Israelis.

He also said that he didn't want just Syria alone to be resolved, he wanted to see the Jordanian peace completed, and he wanted to see the Lebanese peace completed. And he said something that everybody wanted to hear in the Middle East, which is that he wanted Lebanon to be an independent country with a peace with Israel. So I was quite pleased with that.

So from now on, the question of the differences between Syria and the United States, which we spent about an hour on today, spent a significant portion of our meeting on it, because I thought it was important that neither one of us be under any illusions about the differences that are still there and because I think it's important in this peace negotiation that we both have absolute credibility with each other. So we thought we had to spend some time on it.

We agreed to try to get beyond sort of a general and accusatory level by letting the Secretary of State and the Foreign Minister of Syria develop a process to specifically

identify these things that trouble the United States so much and to give them a chance to specifically identify things about our policy toward them or the Middle East in general that trouble them and to try to set in motion a process for working through it, because every report I've gotten over the years, encounters—and you know, I've spent a lot of time talking to Westerners because of the Middle East issue. Things always stop, in my judgment, at a level that is too general, where people are charging and countercharging and there's no real effort to lay the kind of factual basis that has to be laid—you're going to really argue that people should change their policies. So I feel pretty good about it.

Pan Am 103 Bombing

Q. Were you satisfied, sir, that there was no Syrian involvement or complicity in the Pan Am 103 bombing?

The President. I can tell you this: First I raised that, and he raised it again. I can tell you that we have absolutely no evidence of it, and that he flatly denied it. And he reminded us and me that a Syrian was killed on Pan Am 103 who was the only son of a woman from his home area. And he said it was a—he characterized it as a cruel and senseless thing—had no point killing all those students. And he said, “This is an issue I will never close or never consider closed. If you ever have any evidence that any Syrian is involved, you just let me know, and we will take the appropriate action.”

Russia

Q. Back on Russia. What were you told about that Mr. Gaydar was going to resign? Who told you that, and how serious do you think it is?

The President. All the days kind of run together. Yeltsin told me that; here's how he characterized it. I wasn't quite sure exactly how to—he told me that he thought there was a strong possibility that Gaydar would decide that he needed to devote all of his time to leading the party that he took into the Duma and building his political strength both in the Parliament and out of the country and that he was concerned about building it up politically and making it effective in the Duma.

He said—the reason, you see, you say when—I’m trying to remember. I think it was sometime during the first day as opposed to the second day’s conversations that he said it. But I’m sorry I can’t remember when.

Q. What are your impressions of Asad?

The President. Let me answer the question. He also went out of his way to tell me, though, he said, “We are not going to reverse our reform course, and we don’t want to slow it down, but we do want to cushion the impact of it better. We want to have a better sense of how it affects people.” And he said, “We also want to try to demonstrate the successes more clearly. We want to be able to show people that this has been done.” And in that connection—and you know what he asked? He was very pleased with a lot of the initiatives that I told him we worked on, like we were working to get the G-7 to make sure that the countries that buy oil from Russia, for example, and buy energy from Russia could pay for it in a timely fashion, so they can use that money to help them build their country. That’s a big deal to them. He was interested in getting his next IMF money in a timely fashion. He was interested in making sure that the accumulated debt, ones he’s making payments on, can be rescheduled. In other words, he didn’t want to slow down reform. He wanted to make it work better, and he wanted to make sure that they had some strategies for cushioning the impact on ordinary people. He also said that he would keep a team that was reform oriented, that it would be a good, competent team.

Gaydar left the government once before, and the reforms didn’t stop. So the only thing I encouraged him to do was, I said, “You’ve proved your commitment to democracy. You’ve stayed with this reform. You’ve still got some tough decisions to make.” I told him, I said, “I contacted the G-7 before I came up here. We want to help cushion the impact of reform, and we want to help make sure the people of Russia know what you’re doing to help the economy. And if you’re going to keep on the reform path, it’ll be easier for us to do that, because then we’ll be able to make sure that the IMF and the World Bank support you as well as these individual countries.”

I found it to be a satisfactory conversation. You know he’s in some—the political situation over there is not free of difficulty. I mean, you just only have to look at the make-up of the lower House of the Parliament to draw that conclusion. But I think he’ll try to hang in there, mostly because if you look at the go-slower approach and you look at Ukraine and you see they’re in worse shape than Russia.

And one of the things—and let me just say that this is something I didn’t even talk about on the trip—but one of the things I want to spend a lot more time doing when I get back and have our people try to be helpful on is trying to dissect what we mean by reform, because there are at least three big elements to it. There’s the privatization of government-owned companies, which Russia is doing very, very well, better than anybody else. There’s the management of fiscal and monetary policy, which means you’ve got to keep inflation down at a reasonable level to get private investment, which means you can’t just keep on printing money to pay for subsidies in a dying industry. They’re having trouble with that, although they’re doing better than they were last year. Then the third area is making sure you’ve got the infrastructure, if I could use that much-maligned word, that will attract investment from outside the country and will permit the markets to work. That means you’ve got to have a system of laws relating to private property, contracts, bankruptcy, clear, unambiguous taxation laws, that sort of stuff.

If you look at Czechoslovakia, which is the most—I mean, the Czech Republic, which is the most successful of the former Communist countries, they’re behind Russia on privatization but ahead on the infrastructure. So the one thing that I think we need to focus on is now that they’ve got a constitutional democracy, and all of them, even the ones who want to slow down reform, want more investment—this is interesting—they all want more investment. Even the ones that think, “Well, reform has gone too fast,” they might be for the first time in a real position now to write some of the laws in such a way that will attract a lot more investment.

For example, if you want to make an energy investment in Russia, you may not care

what the rate of privatization of small companies is, but you do want to know if you put the money in there and who you're investing with, is your investment good, what do you do in case of breach of contract, what are your tax obligations if you make money? Just clear, simple, straightforward stuff that we take for granted that I think they now have to do a little more work on.

Q. How concerned was Yeltsin about the rise of ultranationalist sentiment? And did you give him any counsel on how to alleviate those feelings of humiliation?

The President. Well, let me see how I should answer that. I don't want to talk in great detail about our conversation, because I think he should be able to answer that. I don't want to read his mind for you. I think that he believes that the more the voters know about some of the positions taken by the ultranationalists, including Zhirinovskiy, the more likely they will be to pull away from them. And he believes that the promises which were made by the ultranationalists could not reasonably be expected to be kept. So I think that his view is that what he needs to do is try to do the best he can with his job, turn things around, show some successes, and that that's the best way to dampen them down.

One thing I did say to him was that just following the campaign from afar, as we all did, that the ultranationalists seemed in some ways—in some ways the Communists did, too—to lay too much of an uncontested claim to the feelings of national pride. That is, that the reformers, we all know, didn't run in a coherent bloc and didn't present a coherent message. And as the Democrats know in the United States—I kicked him on purpose because he's talked about this—it's sort of like the problems that the Democrats had for the last 20 years winning the Presidency. You could say, here's a problem and here's my four-point solution to the problem, but if all you get is a good government vote, that's never going to be a majority, especially when people are hurting.

So the only counsel I gave him was that Yeltsin cut through all the traditional barriers when he stood up on that tank, or even earlier when he became Gorbachev's successor, he embodied the change and the pride of

Russia. You didn't have to choose. You saw the pride of Russia and the change in a person. And by his actions he did that.

And what I suggested to him was that his group, they needed to find spokespersons, and they needed to find ways of saying what they were about that also says we're proworker, we're profamily, we're anticrime, and we're for bringing the pride of this nation back. And our plan will make the—[*inaudible*]—because I think to be fair to them, their task has been so daunting, that they would naturally become absorbed in the overwhelming burdens of just doing the details of it. These other guys were never in government, you know. They had the freedom of just going out and making speeches. And the only thing I cautioned to Yeltsin, I said, "Look, I saw the Democrats in America get killed for years because they go out there and they talk about problem x, y, and z and have a four-point program for every one. And they might be right, but if it didn't resonate with a larger concern for the voters, it could never be translated into a national mandate." And I think we had a great conversation about it, and I think he was interested in it, because he understands that that's how he got to be President in the first place, change and pride.

Q. You don't think he's emotional enough?

The President. I think he's deeply emotional enough. But in the last election, keep in mind, he put all of his prestige and effort into passing the Constitution. And he prevailed. So a lot of people voted for Boris Yeltsin and his constitution and also voted for the Communist candidate, the agrarian candidate, Zhirinovskiy and his crowd. That's the point I'm trying to make. And he needs to win the overlap. He can't let them win the overlap if he's going to govern the country and move it forward.

President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria

Q. How about Asad, what are your impressions?

The President. Smart. Very tough.

Q. What is that?

The President. He's very smart and very tough and has a very clear view of what he thinks has happened in the Middle East in the last 25 years and what he thinks ought

to happen. On the other hand, I think that he has reached a conclusion that it is in the interest of his people, his administration, and his legacy to make a meaningful and lasting peace. I believe that.

Q.[*Inaudible*]*—talk about moving his troops out of Lebanon at all?*

The President. Well, he said, first of all, that he thought that—he agreed with me that there ought to be a peace in Lebanon—agreeing—agreement that operated was developed in parallel with the Syrian track and that the end of it ought to be a fully independent Lebanon, an accord consistent with the Taif Accords, which—therefore, the inevitable answer is yes.

Q. Did he ask you, if there was peace between Israel and Syria, we would commit—[*inaudible*]*—equipment to commit U.S. troops in the Golan Heights in order to keep the peace?*

The President. He did not ask it just like that. He said that there needed to be mutual security guarantees, that Israel's security was not all that was at stake, that Damascus was closer to the Golan than Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, and that artillery would go up the hill quite nicely. That's what he said. He said, "We're not talking about rifles here." He said, "Rifles—all the advantage goes to the people on top of the Golan. When you're talking about artillery, it's a mixed bag." He did not breach that. What he said was that both sides would need security assurances.

Q. We would be willing to commit our troops if there was a serious peace agreement?

The President. What I said to him, and what our country has said repeatedly for years now, is that, obviously, if both sides made an agreement and both sides wanted this, we would have to give it serious consideration. That's something I would have to talk to the Congress about, do other things. But I couldn't make any kind of commitment, particularly in the absence of an expressed decision by Israel and Syria, but we would certainly give it consideration.

Q. You certainly think you pushed the momentum on this.

The President. Oh, yes, I think it's forward now. We've pushed it forward. It's clearly the biggest step forward since Sep-

tember 13th. Maybe in some ways a bigger one because we all knew on September 13th that in the end the only way to hold this thing together was to get the rest of it done.

Q. Did you bring up the issue of the Syrian control of Hezbollah and other terrorist groups that are operating through Syrian-controlled Lebanon in attacks upon Israel?

The President. I brought up Hezbollah, the Jibril group, and the PKK specifically, as I said in my press conference that I did. I did. And he gave his view that he stated many times. He stated his position; I restated mine. I said, look, we're not going to resolve this today, but that we can't have normal relations between the two of us as opposed to what's going on in the Middle East until they are resolved. And so I suggested that we give the Secretary of State and the Syrian Foreign Minister the opportunity to develop a mechanism to try to honestly and openly deal with these issues and let us bring our concerns and real specificity to them, let them respond and see if we can work through it.

Highlights From the Trip

Q. What was the real highlight of your trip? What will be the thing that you truly remember, sentimentally, emotionally, spiritually?

The President. Well, the sentimental highlight was walking across the bridge in Prague for the first time in 24 years with Havel with this enormous sense of pride I had at the freedom that he had brought to the country and what I remembered from all the young people when I was there in Czechoslovakia 24 years ago, how deeply anti-Communist they were 24 years ago, how desperately they wanted to be free. And just walking across the bridge with me, this guy who had gone to prison for his beliefs and who so completely represented the best of his culture, you know, was the President of the country. And then we walked across the bridge, and then had dinner in that little pub with the couple that I stayed with 24 years ago. That was the sentimental highlight. The emotional highlight was going into that cathedral that has just been resanctified—that Stalin tore down and turned into a public restroom—and being invited by the priest to

light a candle for my mother. Those are just personal things, you know.

Q. Any disappointments?

The President. No. I still think we've got to—I wouldn't call it a disappointment because to be disappointed it has to fall short of your expectations—but I think we've got some work to do within NATO in defining this whole area of—you know, out-of-area missions. Is NATO going to have a military mission beyond protecting the security of its members and the Partnership For Peace?

I'm more convinced than I was when I went there that the Partnership For Peace is the right idea at this time and that we're giving Europe a chance to have a different history than it's past, and it's enormously significant. But we don't have—the NATO—NATO was never organized or set up for out-of-area missions. They've done a terrific job with the airlift. I talked to some of our personnel today in Switzerland who were working with the airlift. They've done a great job with the mechanics of the embargo. It was never conceived that NATO would use force in any way, even in a very limited way, outside guaranteeing the security of its members. And I just think that not only in terms of Bosnia, but just generally, that whole thing has to really be thought through.

Partnership For Peace

Q. Just a last question. Did you expect it to take off, the whole question of partnership like it did? And, two, who thought of the idea first? Was this an NSC—got to go there with something positive?

The President. The answer—the first question is, I didn't know what to expect. But it's taken off; it's exceeded my expectations. I mean, I just knew how passionately I felt that it was the right approach. And I knew that I had to work through in my own mind, sort of. It was one of those things that the more I thought about it, the stronger I felt about it. It's not something, as you all know, that just knocks you off your feet once you hear about it. We all know that, but the more I thought about it, the stronger I felt about it. And I think what's happened was there began to be a consensus in Europe that this was what made sense, that we had to try for a better future, not just a better division than

we had before the cold war but a future without division and that if we could do it in a way that would permit us if circumstances turned against that dream to still do the responsible thing by those that clearly were part of the West that wanted to be part of it, then we ought to do it.

Tony would have to answer the other question in terms of the label and all that, but it was an American idea. We started by consulting all the allies; we realized that there were a whole range of reasons for reservations for immediately expanding membership. And then there were some who had some question about whether NATO had any role at all. And we talked through what our objectives were independent of NATO: What would you like to have happen in Europe in 10 years? What is it we're trying to get done? And then all of our folks went back together and came back with that idea. I have no idea who thought of it, who labeled it or who—I got it through the NSC and State and Defense. We all talked it through before I got there, because it was essentially a military training and planning concept. And I'm sure somebody knows the answer to your question, but I don't.

Q. I'm sure that it was a synthesis.

The President. Yes. I think it's something they just sort of came to. Our process worked.

NOTE: The interview began at 2:58 p.m. e.s.t. In his remarks, the President referred to Yegor Gaydar, former First Deputy Prime Minister of Russia; Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party in Russia; and National Security Adviser Anthony Lake.

Remarks on Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities

January 17, 1994

I want to thank Arland for reminding us all that we can make a difference in people's lives and that there are a lot of good people out there who are dying to make more of their lives if given the opportunity. It's so easy for us here to come here and talk in Government language about Government programs that never seem to reach to the human level and to the reality of what is actu-